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MY NEW YORK

WALT WHITMAN

&

FRIENDS

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WALT WHITMAN

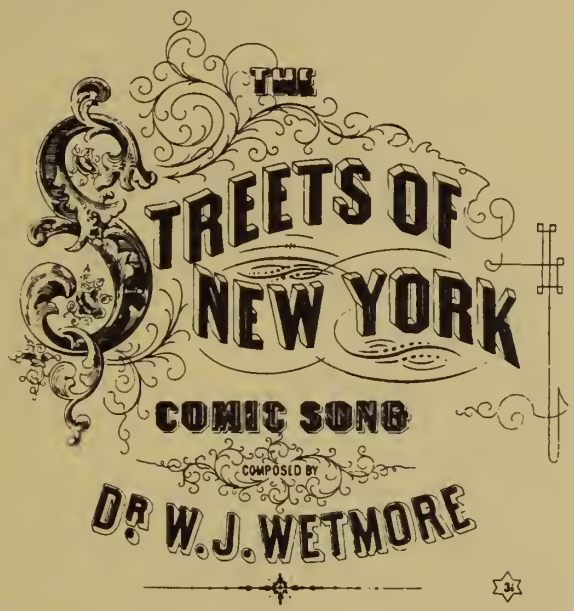
MY NEW YORK: WALT WHITMAN & FRIENDS

On May 24th, 1983, the Brooklyn Bridge will mark its hundredth birthday as the graceful, imposing symbol of the explosive energy, creativity and daring that created New York City. After fourteen years of planning and building, illness and accident, graft and corruption, lower Manhattan was connected to Brooklyn with an awesome bridge that instantly caught the nation's imagination. Soon after the spectacular opening day celebration, newspaperman Montgomery Schulyer wrote a prophetic tribute: "It so happens that the work which is likely to be our most durable monument, and to convey some knowledge of us to the most remote posterity, is a work of bare utility; not a shrine, not a fortress, not a palace, but a bridge." The bridge continues to serve as a source of both personal and creative inspiration to artists, writers, photographers, filmmakers and even people who simply walk across it.

New York City is planning quite a birthday party for the Brooklyn Bridge. A fireworks display to rival the one that accompanied the bridge's opening, a recreation of the dedication ceremonies, a major exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum, concerts, dance performances and even a commemorative stamp will all be part of the festivities. As part of the nationwide celebration, WNET/Thirteen is planning a special salute to the era of the Brooklyn Bridge.

WNET/Thirteen plans to produce a thirty minute historical documentary that will look at life in New York City a hundred years ago through the eyes of one of our most eloquent, observant and appreciative citizens, Walt Whitman. MY NEW YORK: WALT WHITMAN & FRIENDS will draw upon a wealth of archival material, paintings, drawings, photographs, period music and the

writings of eminent 19th century authors and journalists. Using Whitman as our guide, we will paint a picture of the sights, sounds and sensations of a single day in the life of the city in the period that heralded the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge.



PROGRAM CONCEPT

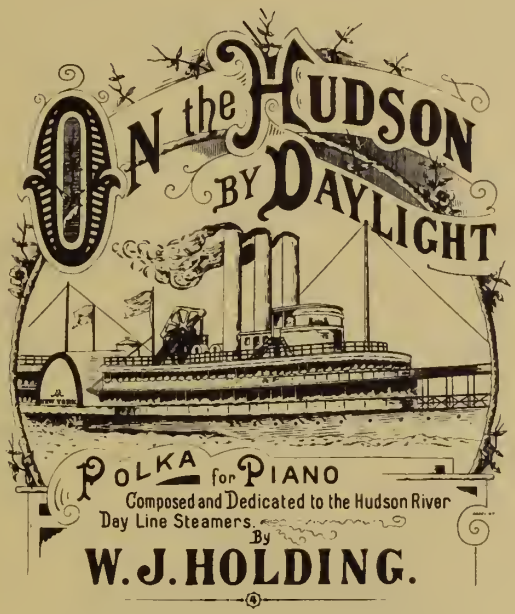
The words of Walt Whitman provide an ideal roadmap to old New York - its people, its places, its spirit. A reporter for many years on the old Brooklyn Eagle, celebrated poet, essayist and inveterate urbanite, Whitman lived in New York and returned to it again and again during his later years. He sang its praises in all seasons and described its life and people in sharply edged detail:

> Numberless crowded streets, high growths of iron, slender, strong, light, splendidly uprising toward clear skies... The down-town streets...the money brokers... Immigrants arriving fifteen or twenty thousand in a week...the carts hauling goods... Broadway, women, the shops and shows... A million people--manners free... City of hurried and sparkling waters! City of spires and masts! City nested in bays! My city!

MY NEW YORK: WALT WHITMAN & FRIENDS will begin in the present, with the magnificent arches of the Brooklyn Bridge dwarfed by one hundred years of progress. Then we will dissolve into the past, before buildings became higher than the bridge, when the entire area that was to become Greater New York could have been seen from the height of one of the bridge's gothic arches.

How did it look, sound, smell and feel to be a New Yorker a hundred years ago? How did the food taste? What were the colors of its sunsets? Were the streets always dirty and crowded? The prices outrageous? Were the city's poor and neglected better off or worse than today's unfortunates? What about those new inventions --the telephone, the telegraph, the el? Would we have loved it, that old New York? Would we have stayed and become a part of it? What was life like -- really like -- back then?

MY NEW YORK: WALT WHITMAN & FRIENDS will enable the viewer to experience New York City as Whitman and his contemporaries saw it, through their poetry, prose, letters and diaries -- view its harbor, rivers, traffic and ferries; walk its parks, avenues, alleys and streets; enter its factories, offices, stores and homes; ride its horses, wagons, buggies and sleighs; and meet its people.



We will draw all our narration from original period material, with the text to be delivered by actors in characteristically fitting voices and accents. Through the writings of Whitman himself and authors such as William Dean Howells, Theodore Dreiser, Stephen Crane, Henry James, Edith Wharton, Mark Twain, Emma Lazarus, Oscar Wilde and reports from journalists such as Joseph Pulitzer and Nelly Bly, our program will show the details of daily life in New York City. We'll show the extravagant parties of High Society and the lonely plight of the homeless; the life on The Bowery and low dealings on the Stock Exchange; the struggle of immigrants trying to make a dent on the city's surface, and a parade of city officials, politicians, criminals and do-gooders who then, as now, just can't seem to put the Big Apple down.

We will show New York as it was seen in the 1880's. We will peer over the shoulders of artists of the day like Thomas Nast, Albert P. Ryder and Charles Dana Gibson, and through the lens of photographers like Jacob Riis who showed New York its dark underside. We shall be drawing on the voluminous photo, print and map collections of institutions like the New York Public Library, the New York Historical Society and the Museum of the City of New York. We will thumb through the pages of newspapers and magazines of the period in search of what they, too, have to tell us about life in old New York.

We will find the history of New York City is not locked away in some inaccessible niche. That it exists and endures in the form of place names, rivers, streets and neighborhoods. During our half hour excursion into the past, we will retrace the paths of some of the most observant and articulate souls who have ever lived in, loved, and sometimes loathed New York City. We will see the city--their city--as they saw it and wrote about it. As we discover Whitman's own true home, we hope to uncover our own New York as well.

ESTIMATED BUDGET

Talent and Rights	11,208
Staffing	19,567
Production	6,607
Post Production	11,700
Miscellaneous	2,500
Total - Direct Costs	51,582
Indirect Costs	12,380
Advertising/Promotion	6,000
Total Program Cost	69,962
Less Pledged Funding	(27,500)
Total Funding Request	42,462

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